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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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THE NEW BIRTH.

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."—JOHN iii., 7.

Almost all the sects of religion that are separated from each other by doctrinal peculiarities are made separate by some peculiar mental philosophy. You will find that in the process of time the children that are born holding their parents' peculiar dispositions still go on in their sect, from the force of education and of habit; but, after all, men of one peculiar type of character have personal affinities with what is called Calvinistic doctrine; and men of a different type of feeling and understanding affiliate more readily with the social sects, and are more liable to embrace the Arminian doctrine than the Calvinistic. Men of a certain worshiping nature, whose souls demand of them an experience of reverence, of beatitude, of awe, tend almost always to organize themselves in some church form that shall represent these elements; and so, although there are many found in each of the sects who do not belong to them, the great truth remains, that all the cardinal sects of Christendom are organized around a psychological core, or tendency, and that they all hold it; but that they hold so much of the truth as is consistent with a certain mental conformation.

You will find, therefore, that, under certain circumstances, the great operative doctrines which have been preached, have been preached in the direction of the sovereignty of God; and that everything else has been subordinated to that one great conception. Men have not only sought, as all do, to teach the right view of God, but they

TWIN MOUNTAIN HOUSE, N. H., SUNDAY MORNING, August 22, 1875. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 174, 497, 604.

have had the motive-power of their life exercised in exalting him and in humbling men; in showing not simply that God is supreme and sovereign, but that his law, as representing him, is the most precious thing in the universe, and that it were better for the whole race to be swamped and destroyed than that one jot or tittle of a law should perish.

Now, when you bring this view into a community like New England, as our fathers brought it there, you are to bear in mind that it is a doctrine which is no longer held by men cramped and confined by political circumstances, or by old and hereditary institutions; and that it naturally is undergoing modification, arising largely from the character of the times and of the people. If there be anything that is characteristic of New England, it is practicalness; and as New England was a commonwealth, and a democratic commonwealth, from the very beginning; as it was given to New England in the early days to contend against the hierarchy for the sake of vindicating the essential worth of men, and the inalienable rights of the individual citizen, it could not be otherwise than that, having defended the dignity and the prerogatives of every man, they should frame their religion accordingly. Therefore, when they came to preach high Calvinistic doctrines, they felt that there was something needed. They felt that they could not one day declare against hierarchs and against rigorous churches, and assert that men were equal, that each man had in him a kingdom, that every human being was crowned with immortality, and that he had rights which no king, nor heresiarch, nor bishop, nor any tribunal on earth could with impunity despise—they felt that they could not do this, and then turn around the next day and preach that God had a right to tread anybody under foot because he was God, that men had no rights before God, and that therefore they had nothing to do but to stand still and take what they could get. That became inconvenient; and, little by little, Calvinism in New England took on new topics, not so much by abandoning old doctrines as by neglecting them; not so much by changing their philosophy as by putting the emphasis of their preaching on some other point in the scheme of Christian doctrine; and when the shift was made the point

selected was that of the new birth; and the New England preachers, from an early day, have made the emphatic point in this scheme to be the necessity of being born again—for this is the pivotal doctrine, having implications in every direction, and giving emphasis and color to almost every side of Christian theology.

So, then, I suppose in your youth you have heard as many sermons on the subject of Regeneration as upon any other topic of religious doctrine. It is of transcendent importance. It is a truth not less true, and not less essential, than the most vigorous preachers have represented it to be. It may be that it has been stated without skill; it may be that it has been encumbered by misconceptions; it may be that it has assumed such a place in the scheme of Christian doctrine that it has crowded out some other collateral truths which should have been preached more; but, no matter what the infelicity may have been, and no matter what obliquities may have adhered to it; it is still true that there is not, in the whole range of Christianity, a point, a fact, a doctrine, more important than this—"Ye must be born again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Unless ye are born of water and of the Spirit, ye shall not see the kingdom of heaven."

I propose, therefore, some familiar remarks, this morning, on this great theme; and I trust that they will not only be profitable to those who have never made a profession of personal faith in Christ, but that they will also search and try the hearts of those who have long supposed themselves to be living in Christ's Spirit—for there be many that wear Christ's name who wear nothing else that belonged to Christ.

And now, is it necessary that men should be born again? Is there any reality that ever takes place before your eyes which leads you to think that they are born again? Is it true that this new birth is instantaneous? Is it true that men can live thirty, forty, fifty, sixty years, or more, and then, by the flash of the divine power, be transformed in a moment, so that though yesterday they were sinners black, to-day they are saints white? Is it true that that which passes for conversion is genuine? Will it wear?

Now, these are questions of a most practical kind. I not only do not shun them, and do not desire to repel you from asking these or any other questions which an active, searching, critical intellect can dictate to you; but I invite them; and I think that the Scripture teaching will bear any amount of inquisition on this point.

As to the need of a new birth, the question may be resolved into a new form. Are men good enough? How do you find them? Are men on the whole good? Of course, I leave you and your family out; but what do you think of your neighbors? Are they good? Could they not be improved a little? Could they not be improved a good deal? Is the community in which we live such that one can safely say to those around about him, "You love one another as you do yourselves, and I am not going to guard my money"? Is it safe for us to sleep with unlocked doors? Are men proof against temptation? I am not asking you in respect to a single instance of integrity; but where a man is good, just, truth-speaking, sincere, upright, is he not as much an exception as the steeples are in a village? Every house in a village has not a steeple: there are generally but one or two. When you ask in respect to the character of a man theologically, many of you are very indignant at the opprobrium which is put upon human nature; and you say, "Men are a great deal better than they are represented to be." That depends on how they are represented. You say that men are not totally depraved. Well, if *total* is understood as signifying absolute quality and quantity, you are right; but if you mean by it that men are not educated, that they are morally infirm, and liable to sin in the exercise of every particular faculty of their minds, then I say that you are mistaken. In that sense, men *are* totally depraved. There is not one avenue of thought or feeling or will in which, in the hurly-burly of life, they, as they are constituted, are not liable to sin, and are not actually sinful, sinning day by day, year by year. Men think themselves to be good because they take no account of the infelicities, the infirmities, the infractions of laws which they thus recognize. But if there be any who say that men are, after all, a good

deal better than ministers represent them to be, and that they are unnecessarily alarmed, would it not be well for us to take some test and apply it to men as we see them?

For example, consider man as an individual as if he were a Robinson Crusoe on an island, and had no duties except to take care of his own health of body and mind. As men rise, are they competent to that? Do they know how to take care of their brains, of their lungs, or of their stomach? Do they know how to take care of the whole structure that God has given to them? If an engineer, running a locomotive, were as ignorant of its whole structure as most men are of that most wonderful machine which is run on the track of life, the human body, he would be discharged at once. There is nothing which men know so little about as their bodies; and taking society at large, even after the diffusion of knowledge which there has been, more than half the human race die in infancy, and the duration of the life of the race, on an average, is less than thirty years. Man was evidently made to last at least a hundred years; there are wheels enough in him, they are strong enough, they are made well enough, and they are well enough put together to warrant us in expecting that men would run without squeaking for a hundred years; and yet they break down in thirty years. Two-thirds of human life is squandered the world over, because men do not know enough even to take care of their bodies.

But then, how much do men know about their dispositions? Consider man in the family. That is regarded as the best place in human society, and it is the best place. It is the nearest symbol and representation of the heavenly state; and yet, how many households are there which may be compared to an organ every pipe in which is musical and in harmony with every other pipe, so that all day long the experience of each member is that of sweetness, cheerfulness, helpfulness, sympathy and gladness? Is that the case with your household, and yours, and yours, before breakfast and after breakfast, and when you are tired as well as when you are rested? Is it true that there are no quarrels in your family? Is it true that there are no households represented here who have resorted to indifference as the best retreat

which they can make from despoiled love? Do none of you represent families that are hot without a furnace in the cellar, and in which temper is the only fuel that is needed? How many disputes, how many wranglings, how many envyings, how many jealousies, there are that blood—even though it be kindred blood—does not extinguish? If you test the condition of men by their state in the family, they fail just as much there as anywhere else. They do not know how to live happily one with another.

Well, there is a larger relation. Men are obliged to live by industries. They organize themselves into guilds, and trades, and professions. Therefore, there is the husbandman, and there are mechanics of an almost endless variety, and there are professional men of various descriptions. Society is organized into all sorts of industries for the exchange of the commodities which are created.

Now, how is it with man as the conductor of business? As a general thing, the ablest and the clearest thinkers rise and take the lead in all the great departments of industry; and what is the character of these men? Is it found that the best heads carry the best hearts? Is it found that the strongest men are the most humane? Is it found that the law of benevolence, which is the one law that represents happiness in the individual and in the community, is it found that that law dominates in any of the principal industries of human life? Is it safe to trust a man because he is an honest carpenter? If I were seeking for votes, I would praise laboring men, and call them the bone and sinew of the country; but how are they really in the matter of kindness and patience and goodness? Are they free from pride and selfishness and avarice? The man who follows the plow is no better than the hatter; and the hatter is no better than the man who pursues any of the various mechanical trades; and the mechanic is no better than the merchant; and the merchant is no better than the doctor; and the doctor is no better than the lawyer; and the lawyer is no better than the minister! We all live in glass houses; and all of us are indebted to the Apostle Paul, who said, "We have like passions with you." And that which was true of the apostles has descended

through a straight and unbroken line to all the ministers of our day. In other words, when you come to test men by their competency to take care of themselves, they break down under the examination. When you test men by their power to make themselves happy, and their power to make happiness in the household, they are greatly wanting. When you test men by their power to conduct business successfully and unselfishly they fall short. They are avaricious, grasping, greedy, jealous, envious. They are perpetually lying and cheating. There are as many lies told day by day in men's intercourse with each other as there are punctuations in a page of literature, in proportion to the business done. When you examine men as to their dealings with each other in society they do not stand the test.

Well, there is a still higher relation than that—the relation which men sustain to the State—the relation in which men attempt to organize a government, or a system of laws by the administration of which evils shall be repelled from the community, and the whole community shall be at liberty to develop itself in prosperity and in happiness. Now are men as citizens in need of no further improvement? I will not speak of the region round about here; we will assume that in this mountain neighborhood, where there is simplicity of habit, where men are not tempted by the frivolities of life, and where the opportunities of learning are few—we will assume that here primitive customs prevail, and corruption and tergiversation are unknown; but away from here, where you live, how is it? Do men love the laws? Are they in sympathy with the community? On the other hand, is it not a fatal truth that the popular spirit of the community, to a large extent, is tainted with the idea that each man has a right to pluck as much as he can from the commonwealth? Is there any one thing about which men are so incredulous as the idea that nobody is really patriotic? Does any one believe that a candidate for any office whatever has anything but a selfish end in view?

I do not say that there are not men of popular spirit who have a heroic patriotism. There are such men. I think it to be one of the worst things in the world, in bringing up

young men, to teach them that nobody is honest; because if that is done the inevitable inference will be, "Then I do not need to be honest." I would say to the young, "There are noble men who are willing to spend and be spent for the simple pleasure of doing good to society." But is that the character of the race? Even in conditions of such unoppression and of such great happiness as there is in America, are men, tried as citizens, in need of no tinkering or repairing?

When they built Chicago, they built it in the mud. As the streets were raised up, in order that they might be dry, all the houses had to be raised too. Then they raised the streets to another grade, and they had to raise the houses again. Then they raised the streets for the last time, it is to be hoped, and they had to pry up the houses once more so that they would be on a level with the streets. Otherwise they would have been in the mud.

Men need to be taken from their foundations, and to be lifted up; and it would not hurt them to do it three times!

But there is another and different relation which men sustain to each other—namely, the church relation, which men form in organizing themselves into Christian churches on their way to heaven. That is the best relation that we have reached yet. But the regenerate nature of men—the nature which assumes to be developed under the immediate grace of God—has it attained any such condition as that it needs nothing except to go right on as it is going? In other words, is church-life the pattern life? There are a great many members of churches who are very excellent people, and who may in a limited sense be models; but they are not always the most esteemed in churches. I am sorry to say, but I am obliged to say, that while religion has increased in the world, while religion is the best gift that man ever inherited, while religion is man's richest wealth, and while through religion men are inflamed, inspired or guided by the Spirit of God, religious institutions have been about as bad as any institutions that the world has ever seen. True Christians have been the best of all the earth's possessions; but the organized Christianity of the globe has been worse than imperial Rome, and worse than savage life. There have

been more tears shed under priestly hands, there has been more blood poured out like water under inquisitorial torments, there have been more wars fomented by high churchism carried on for church interests, there have been more slaughter, more rapine, and more lust wrought under the name of religion than under any other name. The world has been ransacked with cruelty by men who pretended to follow the sacrificial Lamb—the God who would rather die himself than that men should die.

If, instead of giving way to sentimentalism, you take men as you find them in the community, and ask, "Are they perfect, or any where near it? Are they not all of them wretchedly imperfect, not only in themselves, but in the household, in business, in the civil organization of the community, and even in their very religious organization?" are you not obliged to answer this question in the affirmative? Do not men need to be born again? Is there an influence which can raise men up to a higher plane? And if there is, do they not need it?

You are a safe, careful merchant, doing a large business; you have probably a thousand accounts opened; and it takes a great deal of your time, and of the time of your confidential clerks and managers, to look after your interests. You have to watch men, and head off their selfishness and their avarice. You are obliged constantly to tickle their complacency and their self-interest, in order to bring in the fruit of the seed that you have thrown out. Suppose, however, you should sleep; and suppose, in a vision of the night, an angel should appear to you, and should say, "I have spread my wings over all the multitude of those that owe you money, and they are born again: rise, and rejoice, for they are all honest," would not you say, "Well, now, if A is honest, I am satisfied of two things: first, that he has been born over again, and second, that nothing but God could have transformed him. To change that man is an instance of divine power"? If you were to find that every man you met was really honest, the first impression on your mind would be, "What dodge are they after now? There is some craft under that. They are going to try to get around me, but

they sha'n't succeed. I'll watch them." Your opinion of human nature is such that if men should act sweetly, truthfully, honestly, up hill and down hill, all the time, you would not know your own kind. If there should come a change over men, as you know them, and as they are, from imperfection to perfection, would you not say, "These men have been born into a new condition"?

The great mistake, I think, that men have made, is, that they have expected that this birth would be instantaneous; or that they have misunderstood the meaning of *instantaneousness*. It has been supposed that men might be drunkards, counterfeiters, debauchees, that they might be dishonest and hypocritical, and that if a revival caught them, and they were brought under serious conviction, and the Spirit of God strove mightily with them, they were born again, translated into a higher life, and washed clean; but this has been a mistake. When men are born again, they are not born into any such life. They are not perfect because they are born again. The error comes from this, that you suppose a child to be born when it is born. It is not. A child is born into a family, and the doctor says, "You will not need my service any more," and the father looks sheepish, and everybody congratulates him, and rejoices with him that a child is born into his family; but I say that it is not born. It is *started*—that is all. Why, he has not the first idea in him. A child born without an idea! He is a mere lump of palpitating nothing in a flannel. The only thing there is of him is suction. It is days and weeks and months before he can even turn his eyes. Are those eyes born? There are spots for them; the orbs are there; but the eyes are not complete. And he does not know what to do with his hands. Not even the mother's bosom draws them in the earliest days. It is a long time before he knows how to put his hand to an object; and then he does not know what the object is. It is a year, it is five years, it is ten years, it is fifteen years before the child is fully born. The law says that it is twenty-one years before a man is born enough to be fit to be entrusted with anything like civil liberty and responsibility; and experience shows that a great many are not born then. We know that birth is a graduated

thing. Existence is begun outside, as it were, of mundane conditions; but when the child has been brought into life, we know that its development is a gradual thing. It takes a great while to become a full-grown man.

Now, when a man is born of the Spirit the analogy holds good. The birth into the kingdom of God is said to be instantaneous. It *is* in one respect, and only in one. What is that? A man has been going on living under the multiform law of selfishness. He has lived for himself; and at the same time he has lived for his household—and that is one way to be selfish. He says, "If my family are happy, I shall be all the more so; and I will make them happy." He has been moral—that is selfishly moral. The predominant element of his life has been selfishness. But he is brought, by the divine Spirit, to see that selfishness is treason to the universe, and that the one great moral law which of all others he ought not to discredit or disobey, and which binds him with inexorableness—"Thou shalt love"—he has been a traitor to. Now and then he has glanced obedience toward it, but it has never ruled his passions nor directed his conduct. All his life long he has been living in defiance of the supremest law in the universe, the fulfillment of which is indispensable to true joy and happiness.

If, by the work of God's Spirit, a man is brought to see the want in himself, and he comes to that point in which, with his understanding, his affections and his will with him, and under the divine inspiration, he says, "Henceforth the law of benevolence is my master: many as are my imperfections, imperfect as is my obedience, that is my model, that is my aim, that is my purpose; I hold myself amenable to the great law of the universe, "Thou shalt love God and thou shalt love man"—if a man has come to that resolution, he is born again; and I say that he comes to that resolution instantaneously. It does not follow that he comes to it in the same minute in which he thinks of it, by a great deal; but when he comes to it he does it by the force, or by a stroke, of will. However long he may be in digesting the motives which lead to it, when he does determine, the determination is instantaneous. Thus, a man may be serious in the begin-

ning, death may come to deepen his impressions; bankruptcy may help him on in the same direction, and he may say, "I invested in the cradle, and I am bankrupt there; I invested in companionship, and death has robbed me there; I invested in business, and storms have sunk my ship, and destroyed my plans; this world is not fit for me to live in; I ought to have a better world;" and he thinks of it; and thought confirms his feelings, little by little; and at length he makes up his mind to go and hear the man of God preach; and he does so for weeks and months; but these are only preparatory steps. At last there comes sickness to him; and he says, as many of you have said, "If God will only raise me up, I will serve him," and unlike you, when God raised him up, he was honest, and did not cheat his promises; for then he said, "What must I do to be saved? What shall bring me into the salvable state?" And when it is explained to him that he must come into harmony with God and into harmony with God's law, he says, "I choose it; I go for that law." And that choice is instantaneous; but the preparation for that choice ran through a whole year or more. It may have been four or five years.

Take a young man who has been brought up Christianly; to be respectful to his father and mother and his elders, and to be kind and obliging to his brothers and sisters and equals, and to be considerate toward his inferiors. He has been under moral influences; but other influences have been brought to bear upon him; and he has fallen into dissipation—for the sweetest and noblest qualities are the most easily perverted by vice. He gets into bad company; and he is secretly allied to evil ways. He goes on from bad to worse. It is known in the neighborhood before it is known to his father and mother. At last it comes to their knowledge; but it is too late for them to save him. He soon comes to be so bad that he can no longer be kept in the family. He breaks away from home, and goes abroad, and unites himself to gamblers. He leads a wicked life year after year, followed by a mother's heart and a mother's prayers. At last, in some far away city, he is smitten down by sickness. His boon companions, who willingly drank his money, abandon him

now. He is left with an old negro nurse, homely as sin, but rich as grace—for she has the love of God in her soul. She prays for him, but prudently says nothing to him until, finding him in his sleep calling for his mother, and muttering some incoherent words about home, she, in a favorable moment, takes occasion to talk with him. She finds him tender and mellow. He sees the folly of his life, and the wretchedness which it has brought upon him. Home never seems so beautiful to one as when he looks back over a storm of passions on its purity and tranquillity; and at last, in answer to his mother's fidelity, this young man lifts up his hand, worn and wasted, and says, "God of my mother! from this hour I am thine."

Now, he is not going to get through by just saying so; he has many a storm to meet; he will break down often; but he has a fixed purpose; and it is going to hold. He has lashed himself to that purpose, and no wave nor anything can break him away from it. When he gets well he will have to begin with his old habits. His lusts must be attacked and put down. He will have to fight his temper, and overcome that. His passions and appetites must be subdued. His life he will have to rebuild. He was not born again perfect when his purpose was first formed, any more than a babe is born perfect when it is first born. He was born with enough to start with, and no more. The point of time when a man makes up his mind to make the law of God his model, his test, and his judge—that is when he passes into the new birth. After that comes the reformation of his habits and of his character. It may be a score of years later when he feels himself born again sufficiently to take the step of joining the church. The mistake is in supposing that a man is fully born again when he changes his purpose.

The doctor says of his patient, "The crisis is past, and he is saved." What does he mean? That the man is cured, and able to sit at the table and eat a hearty meal? Not at all. The next day, when he is asked, "Is the man out yet?" he says, "Out? Bless you, no. He isn't out of bed. It will be ten, fifteen, twenty days, or a month, before he can set foot to the ground." But there was a time when the

man's case took a favorable turn, and when the doctor felt warranted in saying, "He is saved."

So in regard to a moral change. A man may go toward it, and then hesitate, and then go toward it again, thus approaching it gradually; but when he has made up his mind to embrace religion, and obey the law of God, he may be properly said to be born again. Step by step he has come to the point of birth; and he is gradually going on from that point to the development of true Christian manhood. An inward change has taken place in him, though it has not reached a perfect form. When a man has undertaken to live a Christian life, he has changed his model and his purpose; but the work of conforming his life to that model and that purpose is yet to be performed.

"Well," you will say, "that is not much." Is not much? Suppose a man has been a pirate on the high seas; suppose he has slaughtered men, and sunk ships, and wasted merchandise; and suppose he comes to a better mind, and says, "By God's help I will not do so any more"? That would be a good deal; but it would be only the first step. Suppose, further, he should say, "By God's help, I will go back home, and I will become a good citizen, and try to build up my fellow men and my country as much as I have tried to pull them down"? When he has made up his mind to that, is it nothing? If a man has been a pirate, the moment he changes his purpose, and ceases to be a pirate, and hates piracy, and gets out of it forever, he is born again so far as that is concerned, though his evil habits are not all overcome, and though the effects of his wrong doing are not repaired.

So, when a man who is given over to selfishness breaks away from it, and his whole soul rises up and takes hold of a new ideal, a new model, a new life, he is born again, though he is yet a child, though he is still a young man, though he is not largely developed in that new life.

Consider the benefit of it. I have sometimes heard this doctrine preached in such a way that it was a bar to men. Men have been very good—very moral, that is, good in the ordinary and lower sense of the term; they have been happy

themselves, and have added happiness to those around about them, in a limited way; but of a Sunday they hear from the pulpit a sermon in which they are told that they have been dealing in bogus coin; that morality is of no use. The preacher says to them, "You must be born again. No matter how pure and white you are, there is a mysterious something called the *new birth* which is indispensable. When you get that you will have a pass-ticket by which you can go to heaven; but you cannot get in without that." And they say, "Then I will wait for it. If it comes, well and good; but if it does not come I cannot help myself. If these other things are not good, then they are not; and if God does not care for them, I do not. It is said, no man can go to heaven except God draws him; he does not draw me; I can't understand it; I don't care anything about it; and I will have nothing to do with it anyhow."

Men seem to think the doctrine of regeneration, as proclaimed in the declaration, "Ye must be born again," is something mysterious. It is preached in such a way as to be a hinderance to men. And yet, rightly preached, it is the most blessed and comforting truth in the world. If I might be permitted to translate the passage, I should state it so that it would read, "Ye *may* be born again."

If you were in business, and you were in the place of Duncan and Sherman, with whom, in their great misfortunes we sympathize deeply; and if it were said to you by your creditors, "If you will promise that you will stick to the banking business, and not speculate in cotton, or anything else, we will remit all your debts and furnish you with capital with which to go on as you used to," how would you feel? Would you not think that it was a godsend indeed to be thus reinstated?

Now, what is the new birth but that? A man has forfeited his own respect, the favor of God, and the love of his fellow-men; and the overture comes to him, "All that is passed shall not count. And that which has gone by is wiped out from this moment. You now begin a new life; and it is as if you had never sinned at all." And is it nothing? That is the voice of God to every man here to-day.

I go to the drunkard, and say, "Cease your cup, change your company, and though I do not promise that to-day or to-morrow you shall be rid of the fiery devil, I say that in this way lies salvation." I say to him, "You must be born again;" and not only that, I say, "You *may*." "But," says he, "I have drank away all my friends, all my property, all my health: you tell me I must be born again; but I know that I am going to be damned; and whether the time is a little longer or a little shorter, I don't care." But I say to him, "You *may* be born again." What is that worth to him? It is worth his recovery—his restoration to health, and to friendship and to prosperity. And I say to every intemperate man, to every lustful man, to every man who has gone over into the slough of passion and of evil doing, "Not only must you, but you *may* be born again. The wheels can turn backward as well as forward; and you may be recovered. As long as there is life, there is hope. No matter how far you have traveled in the wrong direction, no matter how far you have gone in evil courses, you may stop, you may change, you may begin to be better, and you may end gloriously." There is hope for all.

"But," you ask, "Is there no foreordination to condemnation and punishment?" Yes; any man who sins and sticks to it is foreordained to condemnation and punishment. "Well, is there no election?" Yes; whosoever will, and whosoever does, is elected. I believe in foreordination and election and reprobation. I see some men go over Niagara Falls; and they are reprobated. Why? Because they go over. I see other men in the rapids, crying earnestly for help, and endeavoring to swim for the islands; and they succeed in gaining them; and they are saved; and they are elected. I know when a man is elected by the way he works; and I know when a man is reprobated by his stupidity and indifference. It is a great and unspeakably precious truth, which every man should bear with him, that while the probabilities of reformation decrease with the length of time in which a man perpetrates evil, yet there is no point of time this side of the grave where grace does not give him the permission to start again. Old hoary-headed patriarchs, robed

in iniquity, steel-plated in selfishness, utterly regardless of God and man, prayerless, hopeless—even for you, adamantine as your heart is, there is hope. If you *will*, you *may* reform. But you *must*. If you will not take it on the sweet side, then you must take it on the imperial side. You must be born again, or you will not see the kingdom of God; for flesh and blood shall not inherit that kingdom.

"Well," you will say, "does experience bear out the validity of that reasoning? Are men who profess to be born again better than they were before?" A great many are not, because they are not taught right. If you teach a man that the church is like a car, and that he has nothing to do but to buy a ticket, and that after that it is the business of the engineer and the conductor to take him through to heaven; and that if he waits patiently, and observes the rules of the road, by-and-by he will hear the right station called, when he can get out, and it will be all right; then you teach him to depend upon his minister, instead of striving to work out his own salvation under the divine influence; and he says, "Why should I trouble myself, if my salvation is sure?" But there is no railroad between here and heaven. There is no church that affords any guarantee of safety. The church can promise help, but nothing more. No priestly hand has any power over you. No solemnity of service can be of any arbitrary benefit to you. The benefit which you derive inheres in you. It comes through the development of your own higher self by the help of God.

Now, if nine out of ten of the men who are claimed to be born at revivals should fail, it would not invalidate the genuineness of the new birth of the tenth. Because twenty-five dollars are counterfeit, it does not follow that the twenty-sixth will be counterfeit also. If by reason of the unskillful handling of men by ministers in churches, or if by force of circumstances, men make a feeble beginning in the Christian life, and grow content, and cast anchor, and do not go on to perfection, it does not follow that those who do go on do not succeed. It does not invalidate the fact that it is possible for men to be born of the Spirit into the new life which shall burn brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

I believe in revivals of religion. I believe in that grand social principle which makes a thousand men stronger than any individual of the thousand could be. I believe in that great power by which man melts man, and inspirits him, and creates a current along which the keel of tardy men goes swiftly. I believe that element which is so efficacious in politics may also be used with good effect for religious progress. Men often find themselves in the current of public sentiment moving heavenward. The great work of God which has been carried on in England under Moody and Sankey is an instance of the efficacy of revivals; and there have been other cogent instances in New England and elsewhere. Though there may be much chaff in the harvest, the wheat is genuine notwithstanding. Though there may be much straw, the flour is not on that account to be rejected. No matter how many men think that they are born again, and no matter how many of them fall off by the way, there are thousands—and the number may be infinitely increased—who, beginning, hold on, continue to the end, and are finally saved.

My message to-day is over. I have preached my sermon—if you call it a sermon. I have laid before you some simple thoughts in regard to your state, in regard to the possibility of your attaining a better life, and in regard to the motives which should actuate you in your endeavors to become true and noble Christians. The application of this discourse is with you. You can let it pass as the idle wind of the mountains, or you can consider it merely as a thing for speculative curiosity, and discuss it by the way; but there is not a soul here that ought not, in the light of this truth, to measure his experience, that he may know whether he has a real conversion or only a technical one. It is for you to determine whether it is best for you to hold on to the end of life, ignoring this great truth and your need of it, or whether you will, by God's help, begin at once that higher and better life which shall lead you to eternal blessedness.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We thank thee, our heavenly Father, that the way of prayer is made plain to the soul, though it be void to the eye. No man may know or mark the path; and yet the feeblest child, the most ignorant soul, shall not err. Convoyed by angels, illumined by the light of thy face, every soul that knows its need and believes in God shall find its way to thee. None can come, asking wisdom, and not be filled; nor dost thou taunt any with being ignorant. Thou givest liberally, and upbraidest not. We rejoice that our hope is not in our skill, not in our habit of goodness, and not in our goodness at all. We rejoice that we are children of the bountiful God, to whom it is a greater pleasure to give than to withhold; who longs in our behalf with more than a father's yearning; who stops not to count desert, but causes, day by day, the sun to speak of God by rising upon the just and upon the unjust, and the rain to testify of him by watering the soil both for the good and for the bad, for the evil as well as the good, telling all that if they perish it is of their own selves, and not of the scantiness of the divine heart, or hand, or will. Ever blessed be thy name that, struggling through human passions and symbolized by men's imperfect natures, the name of God is growing clearer and nobler and brighter to every successive generation. In days past men have seen thee as through a glass, darkly. We believe the time shall come, even yet, upon earth when men shall stand face to face with thee, and see thee as if thou wert present in bodily form, and rejoice in thee, and fulfill thy will, making it their own, and walking obediently in the spirit of love and of truth.

Now, O Lord our God, thou hast made thyself very familiar with us by thy providence, by thy grace, and by thy Holy Spirit; and thou hast invited us to become very familiar with thee, and to come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Is it not this morning a time of various need with this great assembly? Grant that the breath of thy mouth may blow away all unworthy motives. Grant that the warmth of thy face may arouse in us all dormant affections. Grant that we may enter into fellowship with each other in the blessed services of praise toward God, and in all the effort that we shall make for instruction. Draw near to every one according to his several need. To those that mourn bring thou consolation. To those that are heavy laden bring strength. To those that sit in sorrow, as in the region and in the shadow of death, let a light appear. O thou that understandest the most secret thoughts which men can reveal by no language, thou before whom the heart itself is open as a book, grant unto each one in thy presence this morning, we beseech thee, such divine succor and inspiration as that he shall know that God thinks of him, and calls him by name.

Forgive all of us our sins. Teach us how to avoid temptation and transgression. Grant, we beseech of thee, that through the power of truth, and of the Holy Ghost sent down thereupon, we may from

day to day gather fresh strength, with our faces set toward Zion. May we victoriously march the appointed way, doing good, lovers of good, and more and more like God, who is himself supreme goodness.

And then, at last, bring all of us, our children and our friends—who are better to us than the treasures of life—bring unbroken households and undissevered friendship into thine own presence, where there shall be no more death, nor division, nor misunderstanding, nor separation, nor sorrow, but where everlasting joy shall rise and crown every head.

And to thy name, O God Jehovah, to thy name, O Lord Jesus Christ, and unto thee, O sanctifying and enlightening Spirit, shall be the praise of our salvation, forever and forever. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

GRANT, our heavenly Father, thy Spirit to rest upon the hearts and consciences of this great assembly. May the truth, weakened by human hands and imperfect in its interpretation, be by the power of God from on high brought home to the understanding, and the conscience, and the purpose of every one. Oh, that there may be some who shall turn their faces heavenward; some who shall count themselves unworthy of death, and worthy, through Jesus Christ, of eternal life. May one, and another, and another begin the upward way which, though it be narrow and though it be hard, shall grow easier as it grows steeper; and at last may we all be borne on angel wings which shall speed us to our eternal rest.

We ask it for Christ Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

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